METEOR SCATTER COMMUNICATIONS: THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE PINGS

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NORTH ALABAMA DX CLUB OCTOBER 2017

OUTLINE

- What is a meteor?
- What scatters my signal?
- Where does my signal go?
- When is the best time to operate?
- What equipment should I use?
- What software and mode should I use?
- What does a QSO look and sound like?
- Tools to help make contacts
- Summary
- Links

> Science part

Radio part

WHAT IS A METEOR?

- Consist of small pieces (grain of sand, particle of dust) of mostly cometary (90%) or asteroidal (10%) material
- Meteoroids bits in space
- Meteors bits burning up in the atmosphere
- Meteorites hit the ground
- Visible light from a meteor comes mostly from the ionization of the atmosphere
- The free electrons from the ionization can scatter radio signals
- Sporadic meteors come from all over the sky (mostly), all the time but are most numerous near sunrise when we are on the front windshield of Earth
- Shower meteors appear to come from a point on the sky called the radiant
 - This is a perspective effect like looking down a railroad track

ALL SKY CAMERA VIEW OF PERSEID 12 AUG 2017



LEONIDS 1999

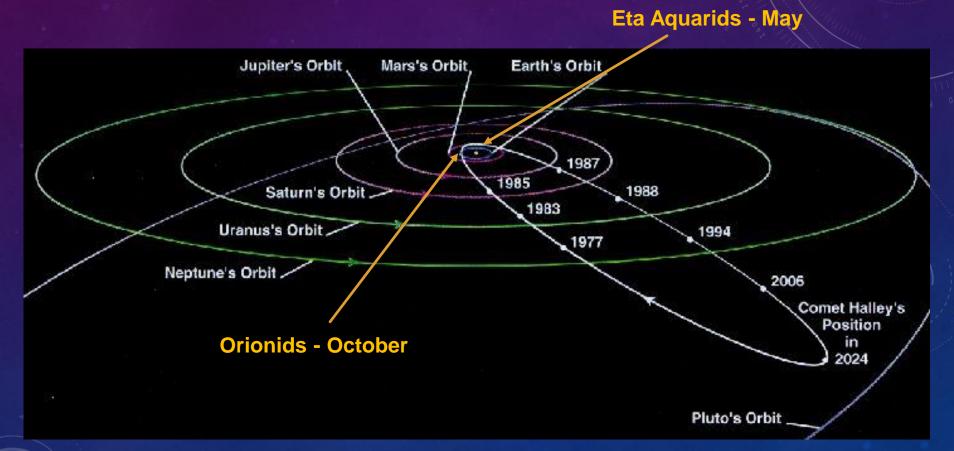


90% OF METEOROIDS COME FROM COMETS

Comet Halley 1986

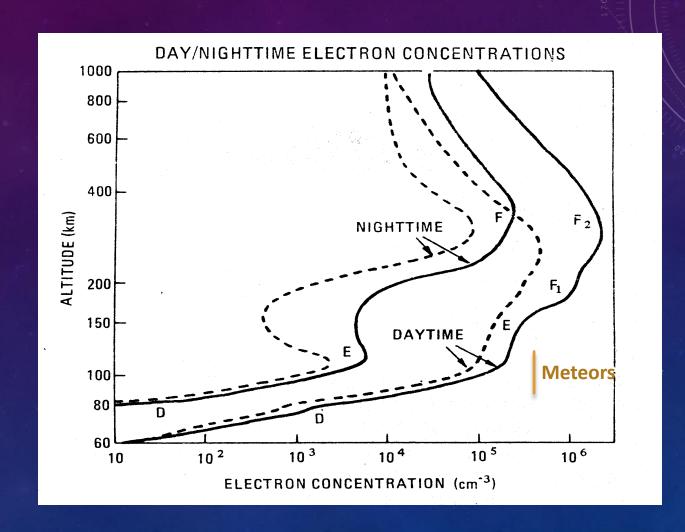
COMET HALLEY

 Halley particles are responsible for 2 meteor showers every year



COMPUTER MODEL OF LEONID STREAM

IONOSPHERE

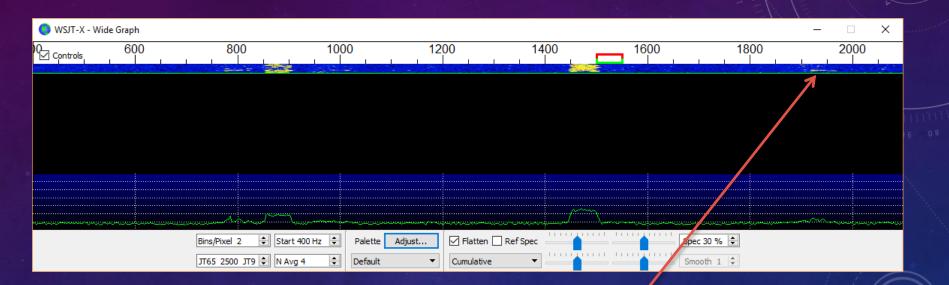


9

WHAT SCATTERS MY SIGNAL?

- As the meteoroid enters the atmosphere at high speed (15 70 km/s) it ionizes the oxygen and nitrogen molecules generating ions and free electrons which scatter the RF (also makes light)
- This occurs between about 100 and 80 km, near the same altitude as sporadic E (Es)
 - The only relationship between Es and meteors is that the electrons responsible for Es are thought to come from metals deposited in the atmosphere from meteor ablation.
 - But Es is not correlated with meteor showers
 - During summer you may work Es while attempting meteor scatter QSOs
 - Es gives longer-lasting signals

6m FT8 Meteor Ping 7 August 2017 02:45:15





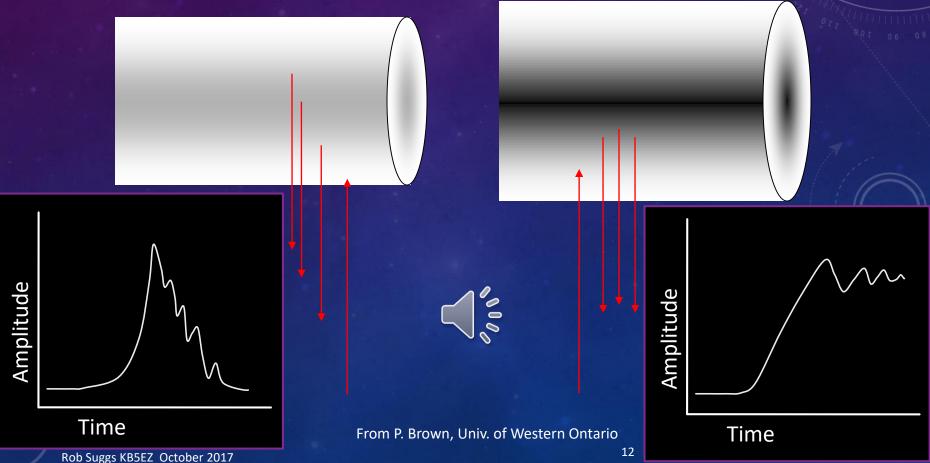
TWO TYPES OF METEOR TRAILS

Underdense

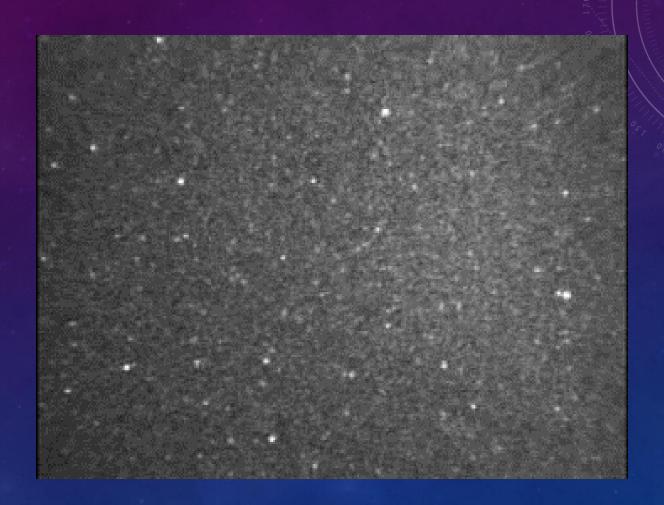
- Weak echoes
- Short-lived (<1 second)
- Electron density is so low that individual electrons don't interact with each other)
- · Scattering geometry must be specular

Overdense

- Strong echoes
- Long-lived (many seconds)
- · Electrons act in concert like a metal tube
- Scattering geometry must be specular but upper atmospheric winds can "crinkle the tube"



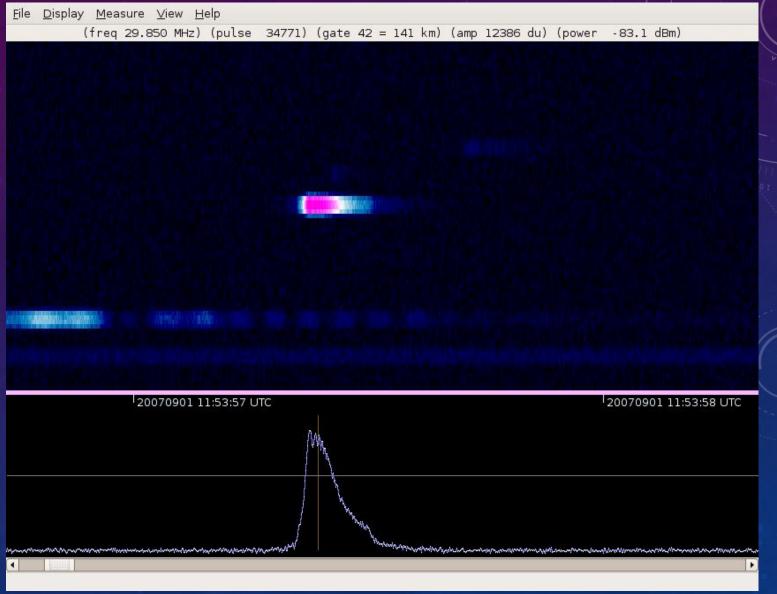
UNDERDENSE EXAMPLE



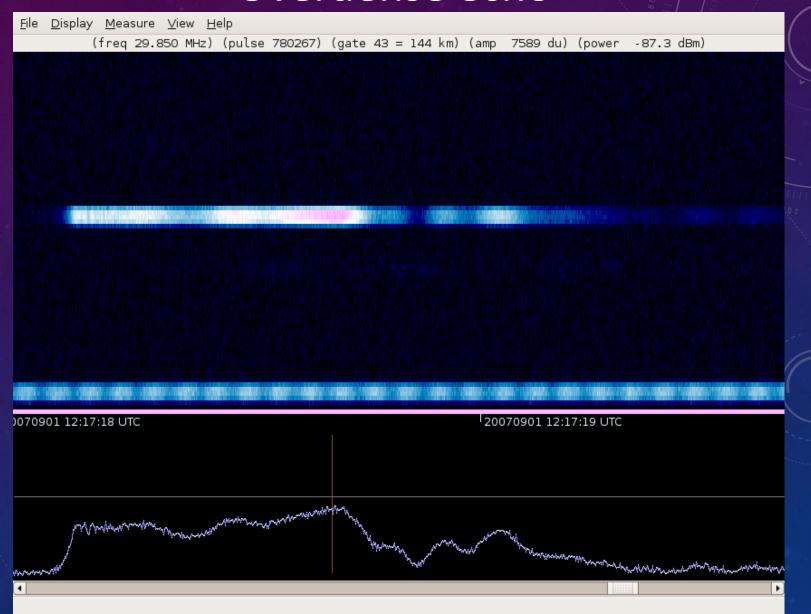
ANOTHER LEONID



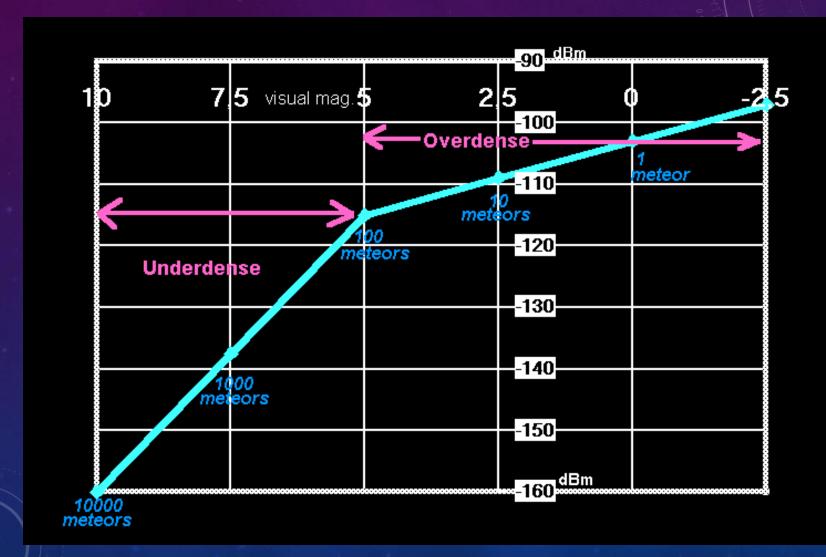
Underdense echo



Overdense echo



APPROXIMATE HOURLY METEOR RATES



RETURN POWER

Important point is that the signal strength goes as the cube of the wavelength, λ , and the square of the electron line density, q

$$P_{R} = \frac{P_{T}G_{T}G_{R}\lambda^{3}\sigma_{e}}{64\pi^{3}} \frac{q^{2}\sin^{2}\gamma}{(R_{1}R_{2})(R_{1} + R_{2})(1 - \sin^{2}\phi\cos^{2}\beta)}$$

$$= 5 \times 10^{-32} \frac{P_{T}G_{T}G_{R}\lambda^{3}q^{2}\sin^{2}\gamma}{(R_{1}R_{2})(R_{1} + R_{2})(1 - \sin^{2}\phi\cos^{2}\beta)}$$
 watts

Also, the signal duration goes as the square of the wavelength.

You want to use the longest wavelength (lowest frequency) possible. If you get into HF bands, lonospheric effects can dominate so lower VHF (40 – 100 MHz) is best. From McKinley, 1961.

18

FREQUENCY DEPENDENCE

 Since scattered power is proportional to the wavelength³ or 1/frequency³ let's compare 2m to 6m

 $P \approx (50.26 / 144.2)^3 = 1/23.6 \text{ or } -13.7 \text{ dB, more than } 2 \text{ S units}$

- But antenna gain is slightly easier at 2m
 - 3 element 6m yagi is 8 dBi (5 element ~ 16 dBi)
 - 11 element 2m yagi ~ 15 dBi
- But most HF rigs have 6m
- So 6m is favored especially if you don't already have the antennas and amplifier for 2m
- 10m should also work but is not typically used beware signaling rate limitations (1200 baud – 10m) below VHF
 - Can't use MSK144

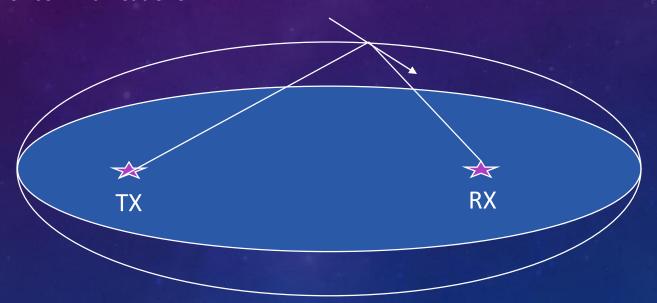
WHERE DOES MY SIGNAL GO?

TYPICAL RANGE: 800 – 2300 KM (500 – 1400 MI)



WHERE DOES MY SIGNAL GO?

- Meteor must lie tangent to an ellipsoid with the transmitter and receiver at the foci
- This geometry favors certain path directions as the shower radiant moves across the sky
- The vast majority of meteors don't satisfy this "specular" condition and can't be used for communications

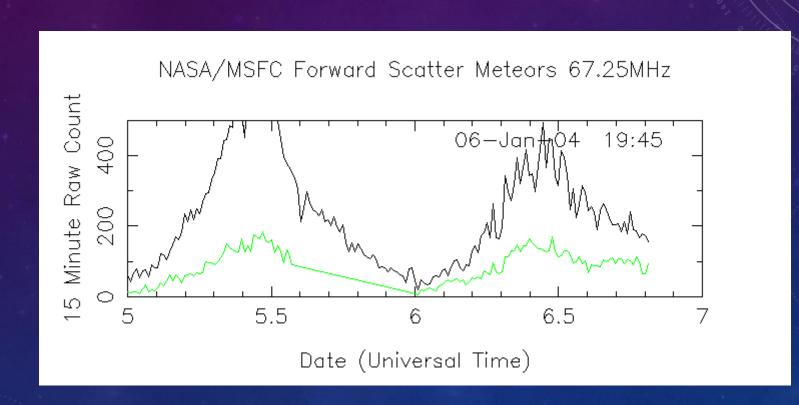


WHAT IS THE BEST TIME TO OPERATE?

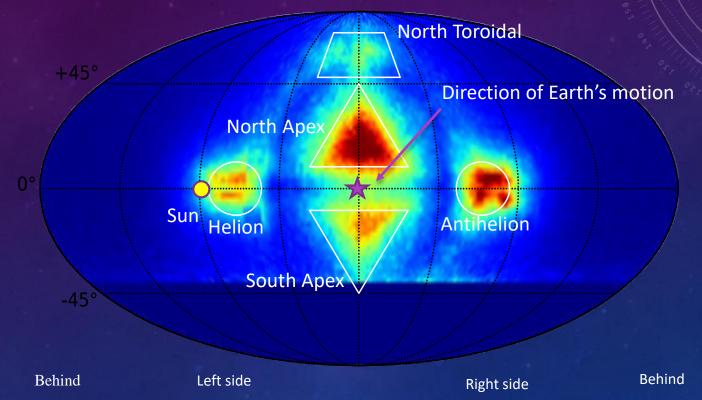
- Morning diurnal variation like bugs on a windshield
 - Car (Earth) going 30 km/s
 - Bugs (meteoroids) going up to 40 km/s around the sun, some head-on
 - Impact speed is vector sum of these (10 70 km/s) all hit windshield, only really fast ones hit rear window
- There are fewer meteors in the spring, +/- 20% annual variation
- During meteor showers there are more large meteors

Name	Peak Dates	Approx. Meteors/hour	Speed
Quandrantids	Jan. 3	120	43 km/s
Arietids	Jun. 9 (daytime)	45	41
Eta Aquariids	May 6	60	66
Perseids	Aug. 11-13	90	60
Orionids	Oct. 20-22	20	67
Geminids	Dec. 12-13	120	36

2004 QUADRANTID METEOR SHOWER



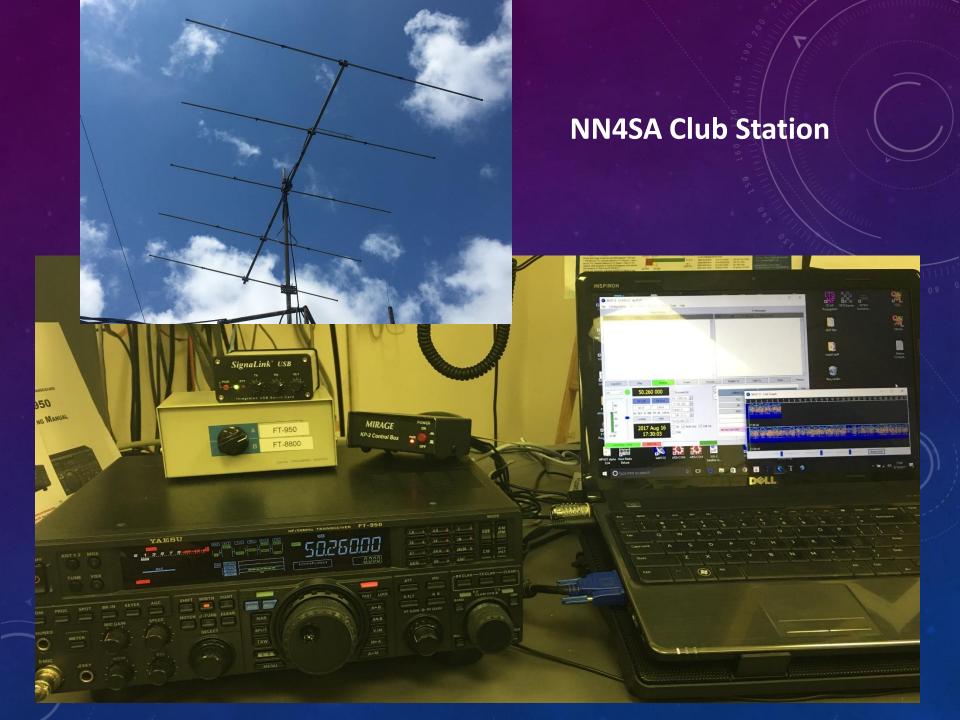
SPORADIC SOURCE RADIANTS FROM RADAR



Meteoroid Flux as a function of direction as observed by Canadian Meteor Orbit Radar. Observational biases have been taken into account and results have been weighted by a constant limiting kinetic energy. Coordinate system is Earth-centered ecliptic.

WHAT EQUIPMENT SHOULD I USE?

- Most modern HF rigs include 6m
 - Throttle back from max power for high duty cycle like MSK144 (50 75%)
- Antenna gain helps 5 element beam on 6m is good
 - An amplifier and mast-mounted preamp help
 - It is possible to make contacts with attic-mounted dipoles be patient and make a sched with a big gun
- Most modern computers have adequate processing power
 - May need to reduce Frequency Tolerance (FTOL below 200 Hz)
- Need a soundcard interface
 - Many new rigs have this built-in
 - SignaLink is very popular
 - Homebrew is fairly simple



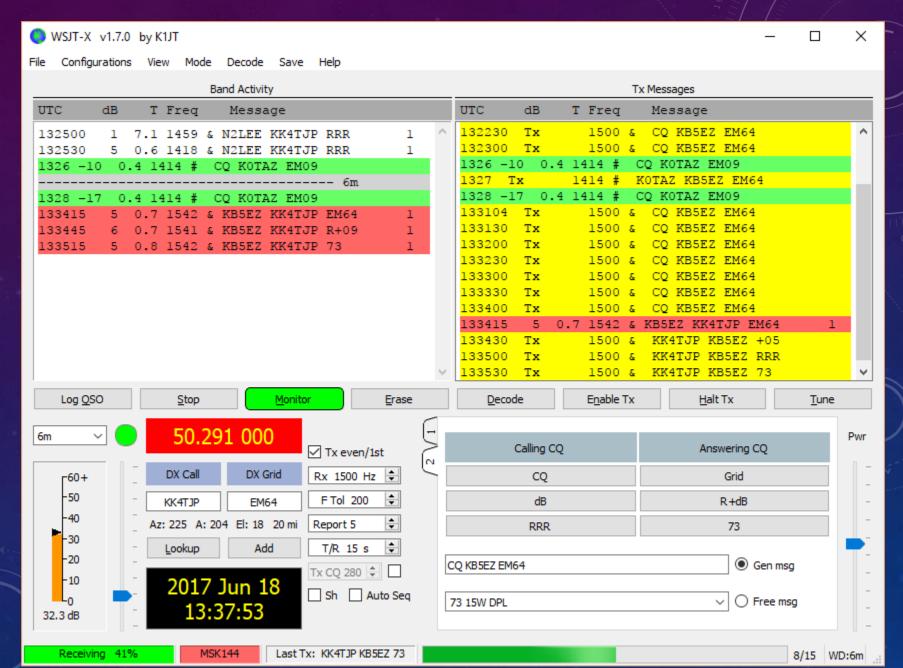
WHAT SOFTWARE AND MODE SHOULD I USE?

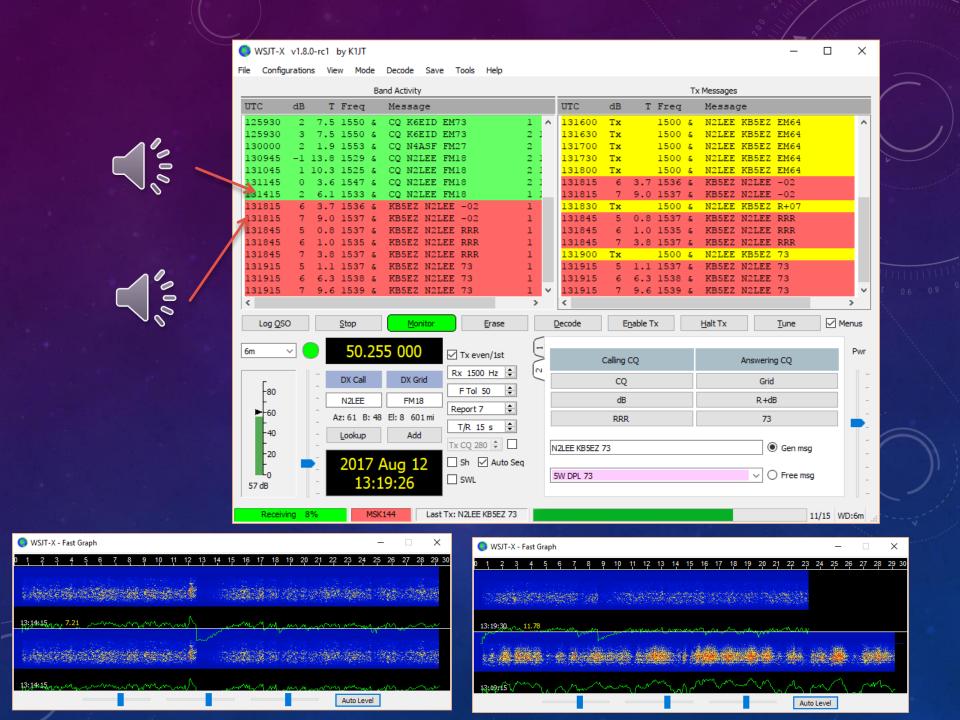
- WSJT-X has the MSK144 mode which is the standard
 - Available for Windows, Mac and Linux
 - 15 second cycle is typically used, messages are 72 msec
 - Offset quadrature phase shift keying (minimum shift keying)
 - PC clock should be set accurately, within a second or so
 - The WSJT Yahoogroup is excellent but READ THE MANUAL FIRST
- Previous versions of WSJT had the FSK441 mode which has faded from use
- Longer format modes like JT65 and FT8 are too slow
 - Recall that most "pings" are a second or two
- CW and SSB are possible but are more difficult

WHAT DOES A QSO LOOK AND SOUND LIKE?

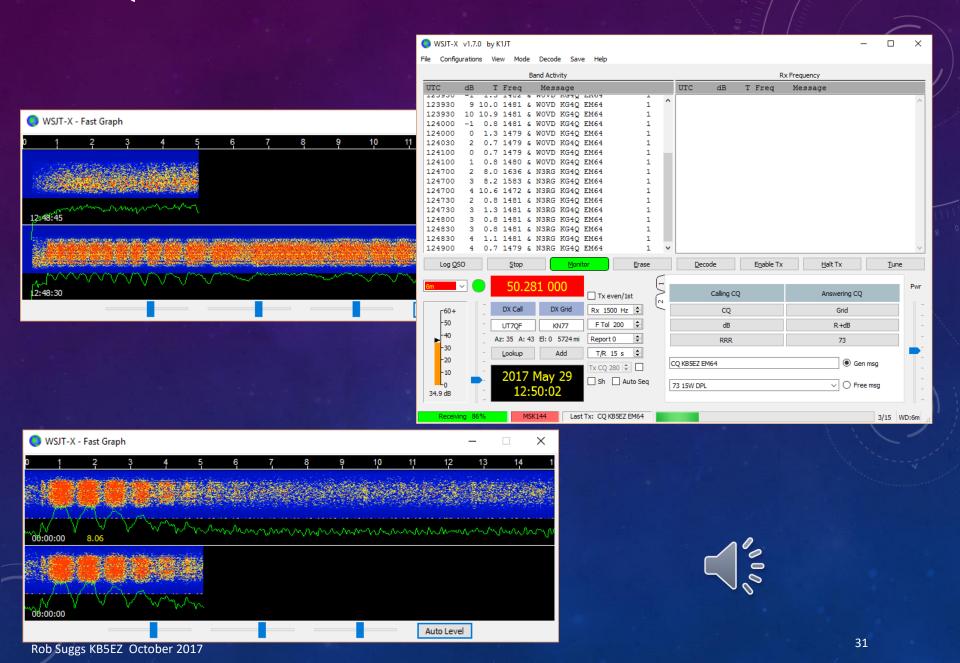
- MSK144 sounds more like a grunt than a ping
- The QSO sequence looks just like JT65/JT9/FT8
- Operators' choice whether exchanging signal reports or grid squares or usually both
- Auto Sequence mode of MSK144 makes the QSO easy

LOCAL CONTACT USING MSK144





KG4Q AIRCRAFT SCATTER 12:48 29 MAY

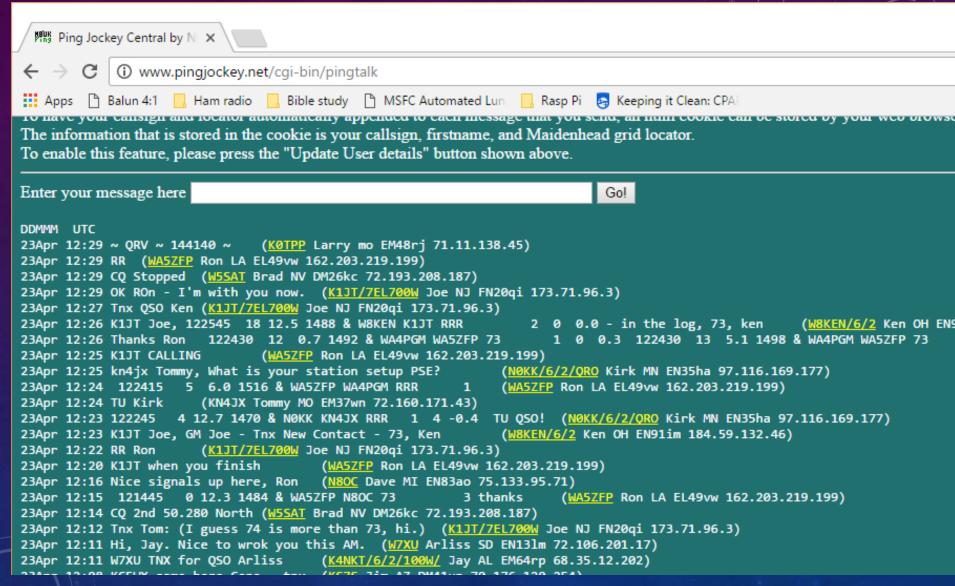


TOOLS TO HELP MAKE CONTACTS

- Pingjockey.net
 - Great way to setup a contact
 - Agree on frequency and timing
 - DO NOT post info during the QSO if you want it to "count"
- University of Western Ontario radar site
 - Indicates which showers are active
 - 15 kW radar at 17.45, 29.85, and 38.15 MHz
 - The system can't see meteors from radiants directly overhead
 - It loses sensitivity for higher speed meteors (initial trail radius)

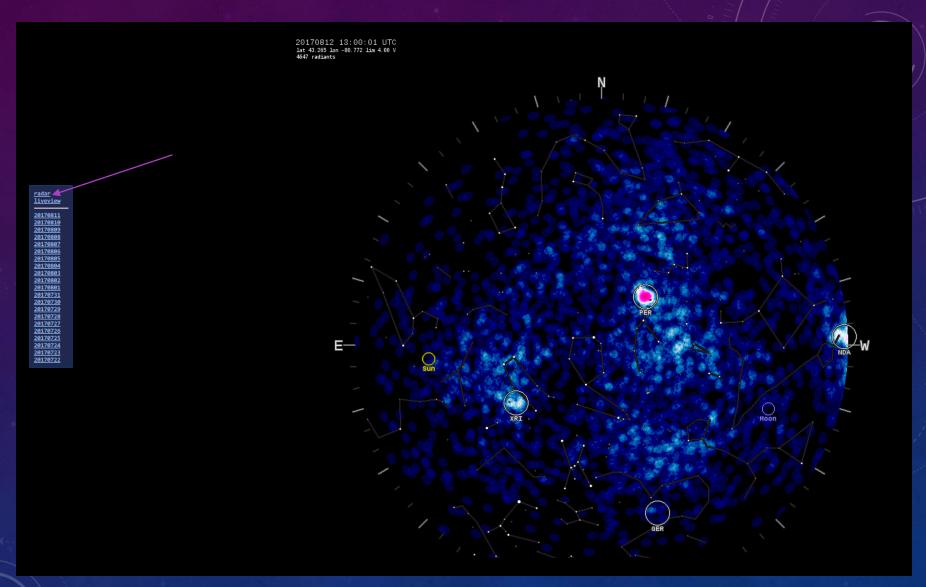
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PINGJOCKEY.NET



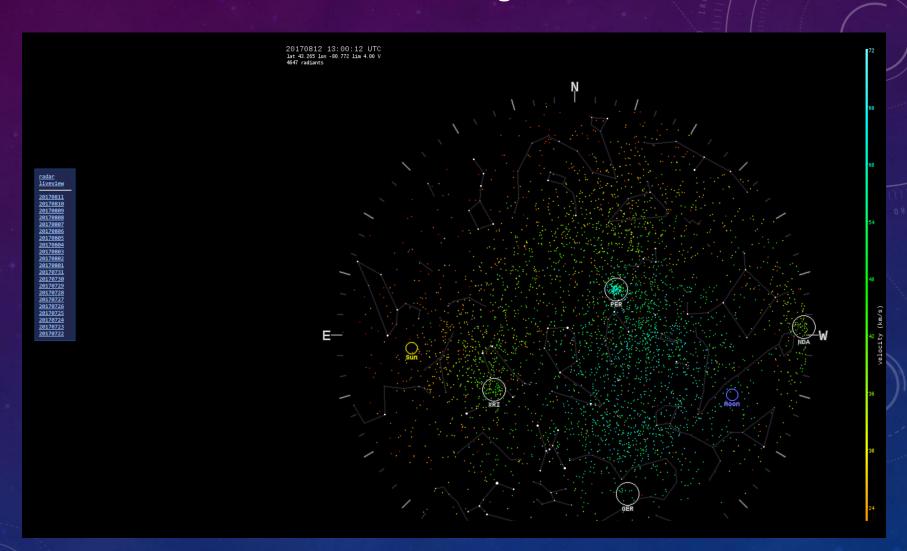
33

UWO RADAR SITE - FIREBALLS.NDC.NASA.GOV



Perseids 12 August 2017

Perseids 12 August 2017



SUMMARY

- Meteor scatter communications is easier than ever thanks to digital modes – MSK144 in WSJT-X
- You can make meteor scatter contacts anytime but they are easier during meteor showers and during the morning hours
- You don't need a super station but antenna gain, a preamp, and transmit power make it easier
 - Try it even if you are running 50w to a dipole
- Don't be afraid to ask for help on the Pingjockey and WSJT groups but do a little homework first
 - Get some experience with JT65, JT9 or especially FT8 on HF to get the feel for digital contacts and checkout your rig interface
- Give it a try and ponder what is happening when you hear a "ping" some dust particle was blown out of a comet and has been wandering around the solar system for hundreds or thousands of years and then meets its fiery end to help you make a QSO

LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- https://www.pingjockey.net/cgi-bin/pingtalk
- https://fireballs.ndc.nasa.gov
- https://physics.Princeton.edu/plulsar/k1jt/wsjtx.html
- International Meteor Organization radio observation info http://www.imo.net/radio/index.html
- Check NASA Technical Report Server for these slides
 - https://www.sti.nasa.gov/

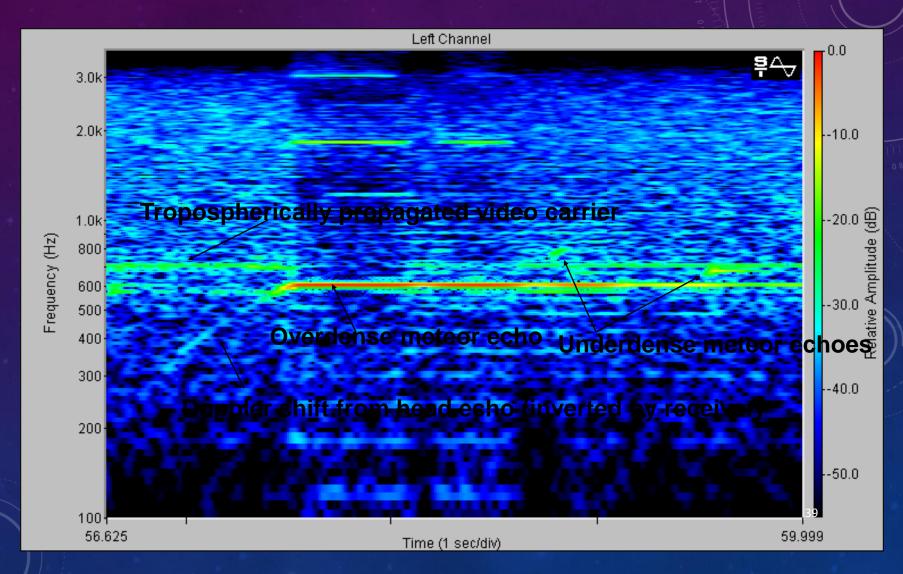
Meteor Science and Engineering by D. W. R. McKinley –

1961



BACKUP

Spectrogram of "Bright" and "Faint" Meteors



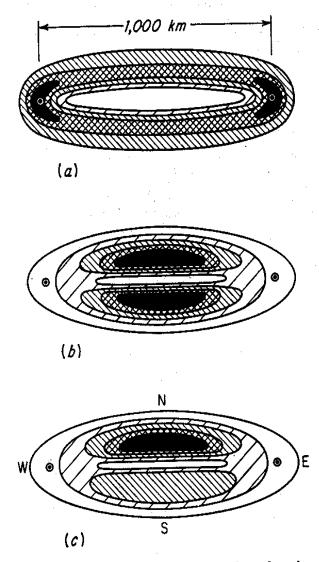


Fig. 9-6. (a) The relative number density of forward-scatter echoes, projected on a horizontal plane at a height of 100 km above the stations; (b) the relative duration density of forward-scatter echoes for a uniform radiant distribution; (c) the relative duration density for a radiant distribution concentrated in the south.

FORWARD SCATTER GEOMETRY

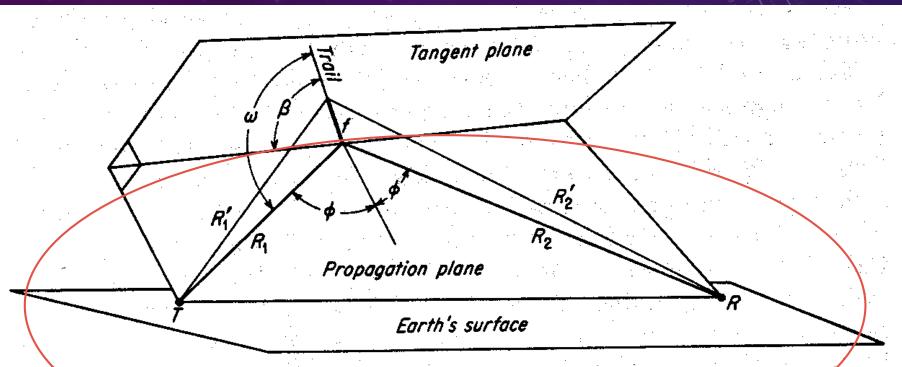
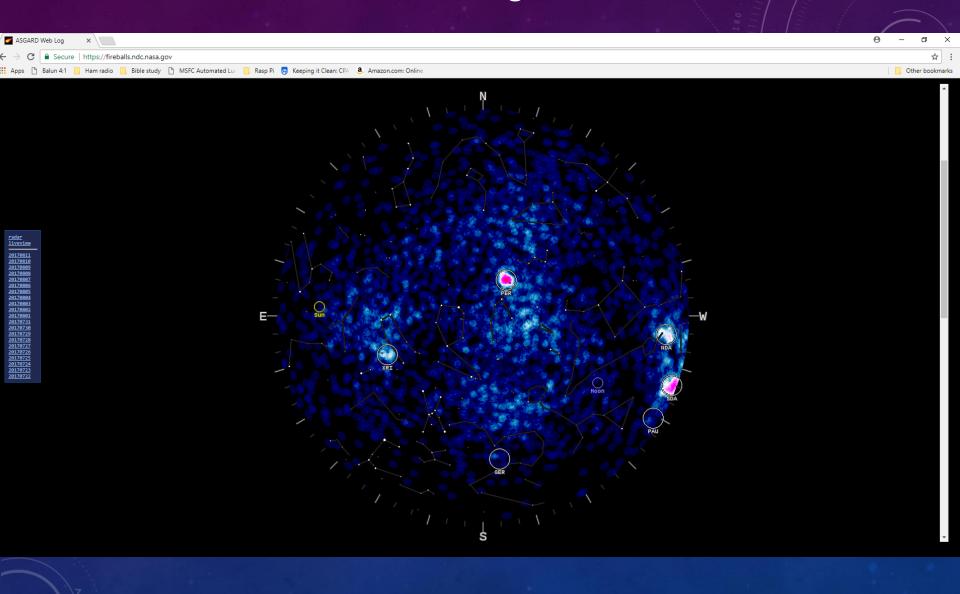
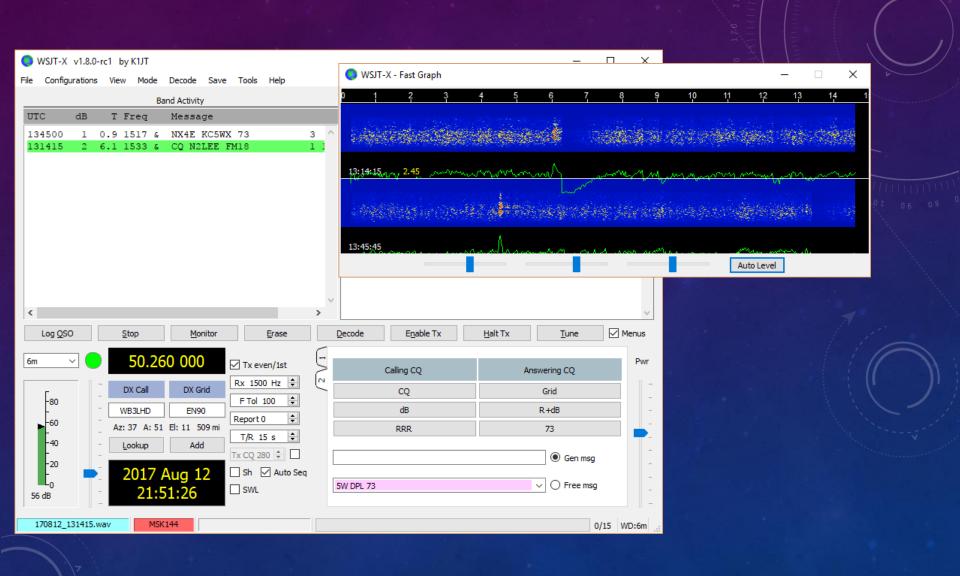


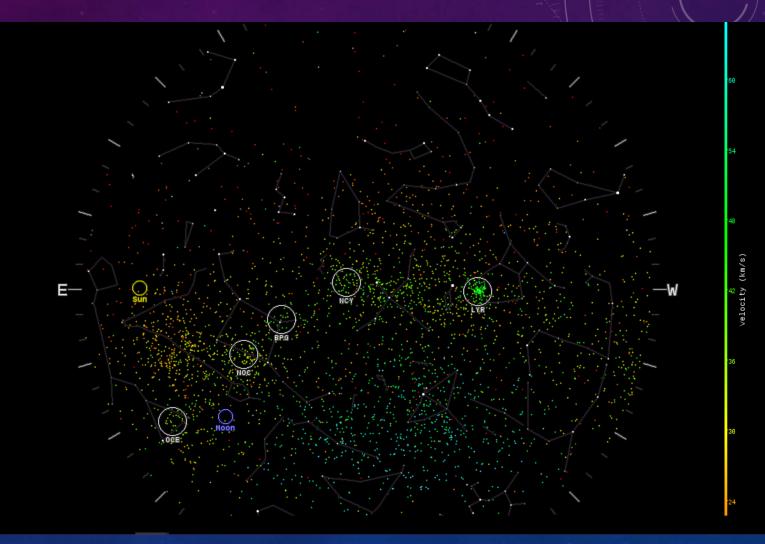
Fig. 9-1. The geometry of forward-scatter involved in the calculation of f, the length of one-half of the first Fresnel zone.

Perseids 12 August 2017



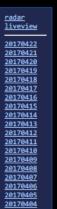


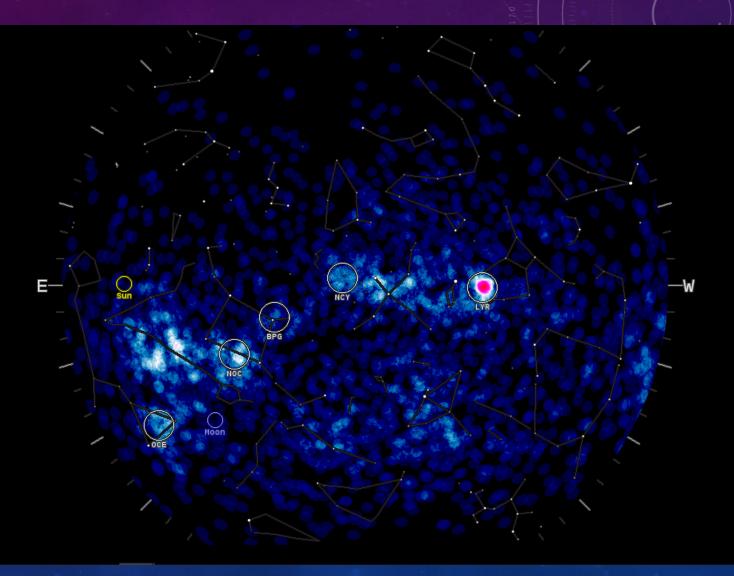
UWO RADAR SITE - SPEEDS

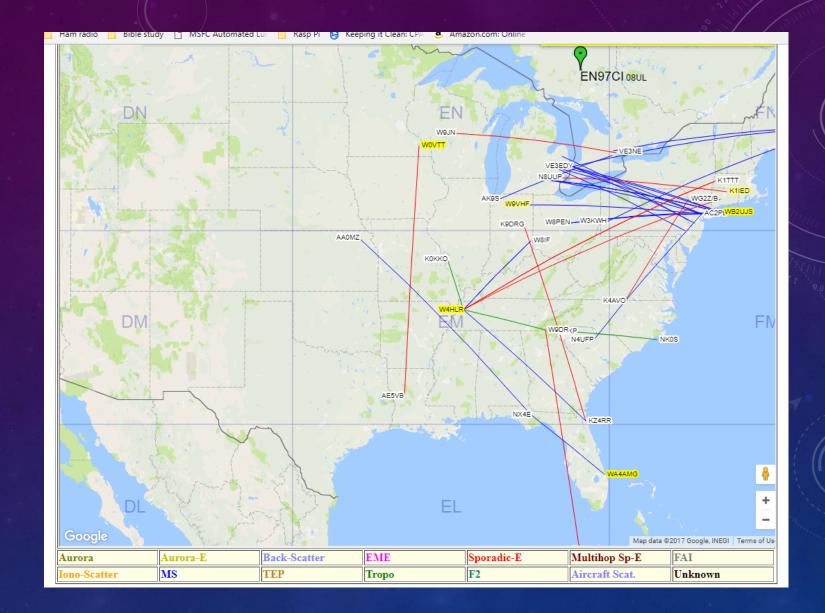


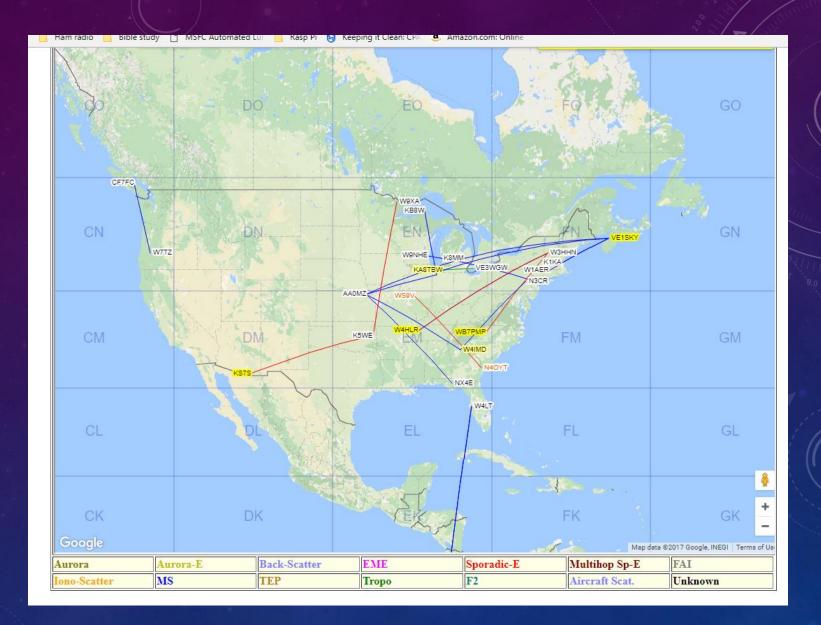
Rob Suggs KB5EZ October 2017

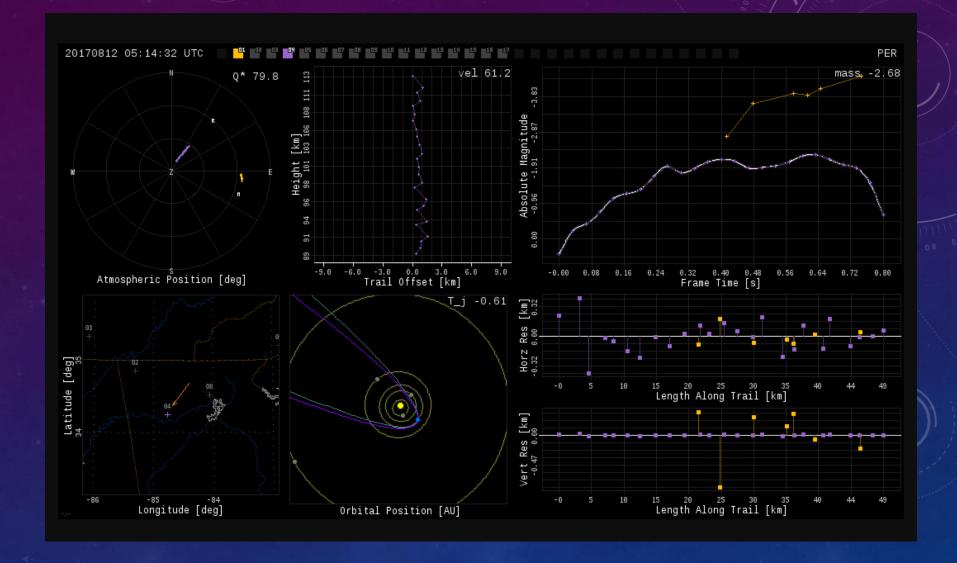
UWO RADAR SITE – FIREBALLS.NDC.NASA.GOV











FSK 441 GEMINID 2014 CONTACT

